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THE DEVELOPMENTAL CYCLE IN DOMESTIC GROUPS

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THE FAMILY SYSTEM OF THE IBAN OF BORNEO

By J. D. FREEMAN

INTRODUCTION

The Iban[1]—with whose family system this essay is concerned—are a people of western Borneo. They are to be found, for the most part, among the remote, jungle-covered ranges of the undeveloped interior zone of Sarawak, and also in certain of the inaccessible headwaters of the great Kapuas river, in what is now Kalimantan or Indonesian Borneo.

In the judgement of A. C. Haddon, the Iban are Oceanic Mongols, and they belong to an ethnic stock which he has termed Proto-Malay (Haddon and Start 1936: 1). In brief, they are a brachycephalic people (average C.I. 83), of short stature (average height of males, 5 ft. 2½ in.), with lank, black hair, cinnamon coloured skins, and typically Mongoloid features.

Iban culture is also fundamentally proto-Malayan in type. In particular, the Iban language has many close affinities with Malay, and Howell, a leading authority, classes Iban as 'a dialect of the wide spreading Malay language'. The Iban language has not, however, been influenced by Arabic; nor have Iban culture and social institutions been appreciably affected by Islam.

In Sarawak today, the Iban are the predominant element in a highly heterogeneous population. The total population of Sarawak as disclosed by the census of 1947 was 546,385, and of this number 190,326 (or 34·8 %) were Iban. Sarawak, like so many of the other countries of south-east Asia, has a plural society. Along the coast, among the deltaic swamps and in the low-lying country bordering the tidal reaches of the rivers, one finds the main centres of Malay, Chinese and Melanau settlement. Further inland, amid steep and tangled ranges drained by swift-flowing streams and rivers, live the indigenous hill peoples: the Land Dayaks, the Iban, the Kayan, the Kenyah, the Kajang and others, all of them with subsistence economies based on the shifting cultivation of dry rice.

In particular, this essay is concerned with the Ulu Ai Iban of the Baleh river of the Third Division of Sarawak. The Baleh enters the great Rejang river, from the west, at a point about 170 river miles from the sea, and along its banks and those of its numerous tributaries (the Sut, Mujong, Gat and Merirai being the most important of them), there are scattered some 133 Iban communities with a total population of about 11,500.* Almost all of these

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people are the descendants of migrants from the interior of the Second Division of Sarawak, and especially from the headwaters of the Batang Lupar. Travelling chiefly by way of the Katibas and Ngemah rivers, the first of these migrants reached the primeval forests of the Baleh in the early 1880's, but it was not until about forty years later, following serious conflict with the Brooke Government, that permanent Iban settlement was achieved [2]. Today the Baleh is an exclusively Iban area.

During the years—from 1949 to 1951—when my field research was undertaken [3], the Iban of the Baleh region were still little touched by the outside world. Their men, with long hair and bodies profusely tattooed, and their women, clad in ikat skirts of their own weaving, were all still pagan and pre-literate; and throughout the whole Baleh region, Iban culture—in all its extraordinary richness—was still a flourishing reality. In this essay then, we shall be concerned with the traditional ways of the Iban, ways which—because of the tolerant policies of the White Rajahs of Sarawak—have survived unscathed into the modern world.

THE IBAN LONG-HOUSE

All of the Iban of the Baleh region still live in long-houses. Architecturally there is nothing very remarkable about an Iban long-house, but many of them, out of sheer length, make an impressive spectacle. Rumah Tungku, for example, one of the long-houses selected for detailed discussion in this essay, extends in an uninterrupted line for more than a sixth of a mile. Standing on an elevated terrace, well beyond the reach of flood waters, and lifted high on score upon score of hardwood piles, it stretches—as do all Iban long-houses—along the bank of a river. Here and there, entry ladders of notched logs lead up like gangways to the *tanju*, an open platform that runs the entire length of the spindly structure and gives access to the public gallery and the family apartments beyond. Over both gallery and apartments a low-pitched roof of wooden shingles forms an unbroken expanse. At first glance the whole sprawling building seems like some huge barracks or pavilion.

Few long-houses have the dimensions of Rumah Tungku (sixty to a hundred yards is more common a length), but, casually regarded, all Iban long-houses do have the appearance of being compact architectural units, and this appearance has led some writers (Baring-Gould and Bampfylde 1909: 27) to the supposition that the long-house is therefore the outcome of some kind of communal or group organization and ownership. For the Iban, however, this supposition is very far from the truth.

Although the platform (*tanju*) and the gallery (*ruai*) of a long-house do extend without interruption throughout its entire length, an Iban long-house is, in fact, made up of a series of independently owned apartments, and

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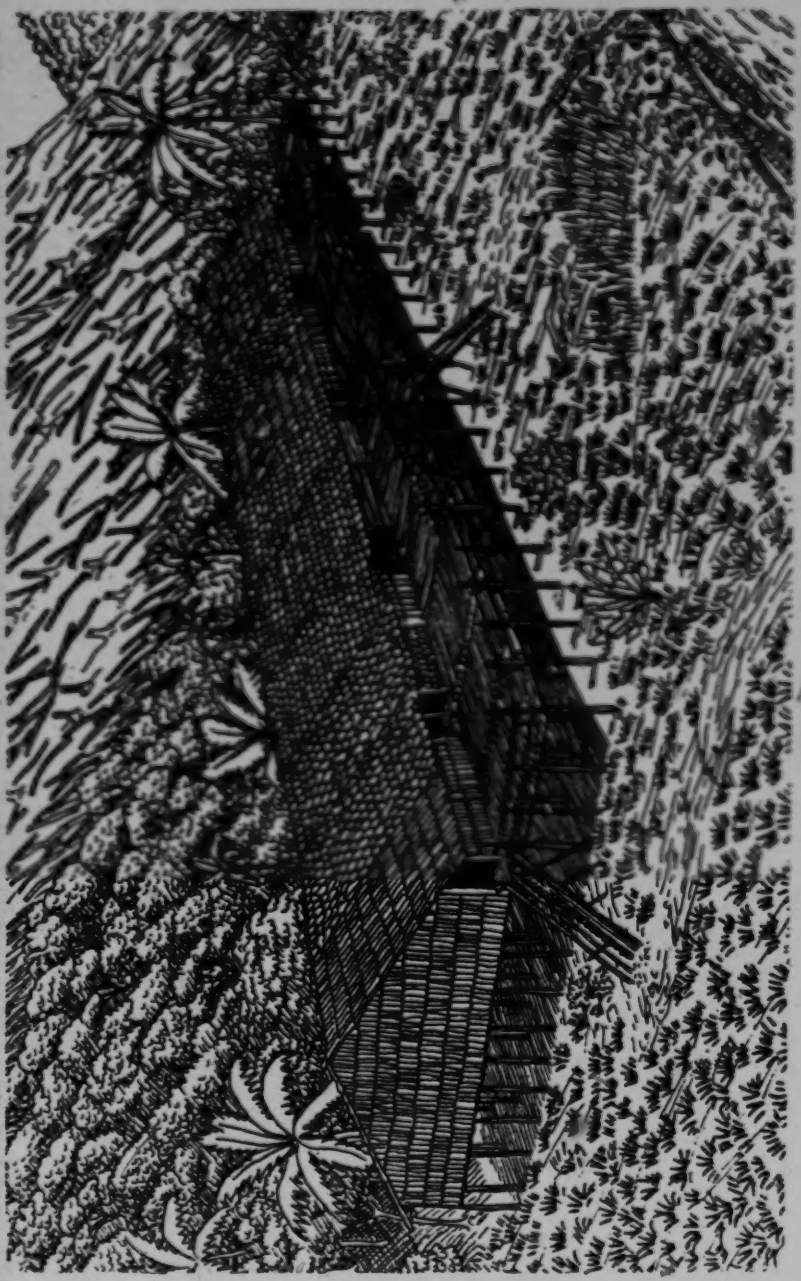

Fig. 1. An Iban long-house

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further, these apartments, although joined one to the other architecturally, are always the separate abodes of distinct and autonomous family groups. Indeed, the only parts of the whole long-house which are held in any sort of common ownership are the entry ladders; for the rest, every pile and every plank is privately owned by one of the community's component families. In a sense, then, the singular architecture of an Iban long-house is deceptive, for its gallery and its unbroken expanse of roof tend to cloak the fact that it is made up of a series of separate apartments, each of which is the property of a sovereign family group.

Among the various families which make up a long-house community there does always exist a network of relationships based on bilateral kinship. Thus, every family is always related cognatically to at least one of the other families of the community, usually to several, and quite often to many of them. However, it rarely, if ever, occurs that there is within a long-house community a degree of complete, or even nearly complete, inter-relatedness among its various family groups. Furthermore, an Iban long-house community is an open and not a closed group, for its component family groups are joined in free association from which withdrawal is always possible, and there is, indeed, a good deal of movement, year by year, from one long-house to another. As all this suggests, an Iban long-house community is a corporate group only in certain restricted ways. Thus a long-house community holds virtually no property in common ownership, nor is there collective ownership of farm land; and again, there is an absence of any kind of economic activity by the long-house as a corporate group. However, membership of a long-house does impose upon each family group many common duties and obligations, for it is universally accepted that the well-being of any long-house is dependent upon its ritual state, and for the maintaining of this all are responsible. In jural matters also the long-house community is a corporate entity, for all its family groups do place themselves under the jurisdiction of their *tuai rumah*, or house headman, whose principal duty is the safeguarding and administering of the customary law, or *adat*.

As these summary remarks suggest, the Iban long-house community, as such, presents a number of sociological problems of extraordinary interest. These problems I hope, in due time, to discuss, but in the present essay our attention will be confined to the independent family cells of which every long-house community is composed. Of these it may be claimed that they are the intrinsic and irreducible corporate groups of Iban society, and certainly, an understanding of them is an essential preliminary to the study of the wider structure of Iban society.

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THE FAMILY APARTMENT

While they may vary slightly in width, all of the separate family apartments of an Iban long-house are basically similar in construction. Each apartment always consists of a single walled room (with an attic above it), a section of the roofed gallery, and a division of the open platform which fronts the whole house. Of these, the walled room or *bilek* is by far the most important. First and foremost the *bilek* is the family parlour: the normal location for cooking, eating, sleeping, and a host of domestic tasks. But not only is the *bilek* the setting for a family's mundane life, it is also the place where all of its valued heirloom property is displayed or stored. At the back of each parlour stands the family's collection of *tajau*—massive pottery jars, usually of Chinese manufacture, one or other of which, because of its great age, may have become an object of religious veneration. Stacked in the corners or suspended from the side walls is the family's bronze ware: gongs of many shapes and sizes, trays and boxes for use in the ceremony of betel chewing, and perhaps a Malay cannon or two. Other family possessions, less durable and more rarely used, resplendent *ikat* fabrics, the silver jewellery and bead garments of the women, the feather head-dresses and traditional accoutrements of the men, are securely stored away and only brought out on ritual or gala occasions. All of these valuables make up an important part of the family estate.

Ranged along the back of the long-house, then, are a series of family rooms, each divided from its neighbour by a side wall of planks or bark. Each of these rooms is connected by a hinged door (which may be barred from within) to the great gallery (*ruai*) of the long-house, which serves as a kind of general thoroughfare and is the principal venue of the community's social and ritual life. Of this gallery each family possesses its own section, and although the whole of the *ruai* is ordinarily open to all members of the long-house, each family retains the prescriptive right to cordon off its own part whenever, for ritual reasons, the need arises. Here and there, in about the centre of the *ruai*, in smoke-blackened clusters, hang the trophy heads or *antu pala*, with which so many of the most cherished values and beliefs of the Iban are associated. But each cluster is always the private property of the family on whose section of the gallery it hangs, for trophy heads are never owned by the long-house as a whole.

From each family division of the gallery an opening gives access to the open platform, or *tanju*, which like the *ruai* runs from end to end of the long-house, providing a space where rice may be sunned and garments dried. Of this platform, too, each family possesses its own portion.

Each family then, owns and occupies a single apartment (made up of a *bilek*, a *ruai*, and a *tanju*), and it is the joining together of a series of these

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342 distinct apartments that produces the attenuated structure known as a long-house. In other words, a long-house is, in essence, a 'village' consisting of a single terrace of attached houses.

592 596 In government and other publications the family apartments of an Iban long-house are commonly referred to as 'doors'. A long-house, that is, is referred to as consisting of ten doors, twenty doors, or whatever the number may be. This method of description has the advantage that it may be applied to any of the indigenous peoples of Borneo that live in long-houses; but in this essay—which is concerned exclusively with the Iban—I propose to employ the term *bilek*. As we have seen, *bilek* is the word which the Iban use to describe the separate enclosed rooms of a long-house, but it is also the term used, by the Iban themselves, to refer to the family group which owns and occupies one apartment of a long-house, as—for example—in the phrases: '*Nya prau kami se bilek*' ('That is the canoe of our *bilek*, or family'), and '*Kami se bilek tabin magang*' ('We, of this *bilek* family, are all ill'). The family group denoted in the phrase '*kami se bilek*'[4] ('we, the members of a *bilek*') is the basic unit of Iban social and economic organization. In the discussion that follows, I shall refer to this unit as the *bilek* family.

The members of a *bilek* family are always intimately related by ties of kinship and affinity, but it is a unit which is primarily defined by the criterion of local residence. Its members—as a group—own and occupy one, and only one, of the separate apartments of a long-house, consisting, as already described, of a walled room, a section of roofed gallery and of open platform. A *bilek* family is always, therefore, a local group.

Further, the *bilek* family is always a domestic family; that is, its members constitute a single household, and each household subsists as an autonomous unit. Food is prepared and cooked for the *bilek* family as a whole, and its members eat together, sharing a common meal. The *bilek* family is also an allodial unit, possessing both land and property in its own right. Thus, a *bilek* family always owns tracts of rice-land, in various parts of the hilly terrain surrounding the long-house, over which it has established rights by the felling of virgin jungle. And, if the settlement be an old one, each family will also possess scattered clumps of durian and other fruit trees, thickets of rattan, and perhaps a small rubber plantation. Again, in addition to its dug-out canoe, its domestic and agricultural tools and paraphernalia, each family will always have its own assemblage of *tajau*, *tawak* and other heirloom valuables. Similarly, each *bilek* family is an independent entity economically, cultivating its own hill rice, growing or collecting a wide range of supplementary food crops, and producing—as best it can—all the other necessaries of existence. Ritually too, each *bilek* family is a disparate unit with its own magical charms (*pengaroh*), its own set of ritual prohibitions (*pemali*), and its own special kind of sacred rice (*padi pun*). Finally, almost all of the *gawai*

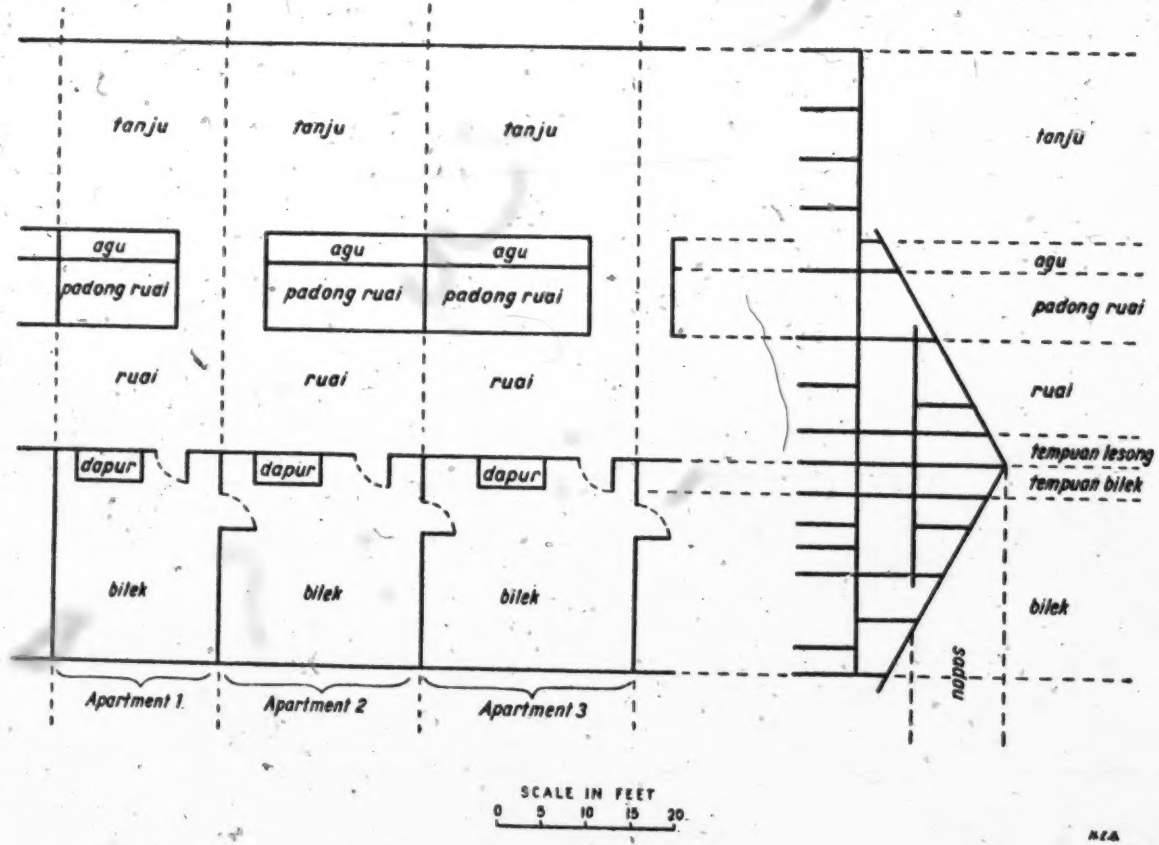

Fig. 2. Plan of an Iban long-house.

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of the Iban—elaborate rituals aimed at the acquisition of longevity, prosperity and prestige—are performed by independent *bilek* families.

Among the Iban there are no clans or other large-scale, corporate, kin groups, and so the *bilek* family is a social unit of primary and paramount importance. As one highly intelligent Iban[5] phrased it: 'Each *bilek* is like a sovereign country' ('*Bilek siti, baka menoa siti*').

REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLING AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Before turning to detailed discussion of the characteristics of the Iban *bilek* family, I should like to comment briefly on the data upon which my analysis is based. During the period of my field research the Baleh region contained 133 long-house communities, with a total population of about 11,500. After an extensive reconnaissance, Rumah Nyala[6], in the Sungai Sut, was chosen as a site for intensive investigation of Iban methods of hill rice cultivation, and an apartment, built on to the *tanju* of Rumah Nyala, became our base camp for the two years we spent in the Baleh region. Later, two other communities—Rumah Sibat, of Sungai Melinau, and Rumah Tungku, of Sungai Tiau—were also selected for detailed study, and more than four months were spent working in these two long-houses. Many additional communities were visited for shorter periods; thus, we stayed at twelve other long-houses for periods varying from two or three days to over a fortnight, and brief day visits were made to about twenty other Iban settlements in the Baleh region. For the purposes of the analysis presented in this essay, however, the *bilek* families of the three long-houses most intensively studied have been taken as a representative sample. These were:

Name of long-house	Total number of *bilek* families in long-house	Total number of members of long-house
Rumah Nyala	25	140
Rumah Sibat	32	172
Rumah Tungku	50	303
Totals	107	615

The quantitative and other evidence presented in this essay is based, then, on a sample of 107 *bilek* families drawn from three different long-house communities. These three communities, it should be remarked, are discrete entities both territorially and socially. However, although they were chosen for considerations extraneous to the theme of the present essay, it cannot be claimed that they provide us with a random selection of families. Nonetheless, it can be asserted that our 107 *bilek* families do form a representative sample, pertinent for our present inquiries.

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Throughout the Baleh region there is marked cultural and social homogeneity; in none of the many other Baleh communities which I reconnoitred was there any significant divergence from the main regularities and principles established by the analysis of the 107 *bilek* families of our sample, and I have no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that the general findings of this essay are applicable to the Baleh region as a whole. Indeed, from my observations among the Iban of the Rejang, the Katibas, the Saribas and the Ulu Batang Ai and several other rivers of the Second and Third Divisions, there is good reason to suppose that the family system described in this essay is the family system of all the Iban tribes of Sarawak.

THE BILEK FAMILY

The Iban *bilek* family has two dominant characteristics: it is a small group numerically, and a simple one genealogically. Table 1 shows the range in numerical composition of all the *bilek* families of the three long-houses of our sample.

Table 1. *Numerical composition of the 'bilek' family*

Number of persons in *bilek* family	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Frequency													
Rumah Nyala	–	7	3	4	3	2	2	1	3	–	–	–	–
Rumah Sibat	3	2	7	4	9	4	–	–	2	–	–	–	–
Rumah Tungku	2	4	9	9	6	7	7	1	3	–	1	–	1
Totals	5	13	19	17	18	13	9	2	9	–	1	–	1

It will be seen that eighty of the 107 *bilek* families of the sample—that is, approximately 75 %—fall within the range of from three to seven members per family. The mode is four, and the median five persons per *bilek*; while the arithmetical mean is 5·75 persons per *bilek*, with a mean deviation of 1·8. This accords closely with other data available for the Baleh region [7]. When it is realized that the *bilek* family is the basic unit in agriculture as in almost all other activities, it will become apparent that its limited size is a factor of crucial importance in all economic pursuits. Similarly, it is a feature of cardinal sociological significance.

Now, while it is true that the *bilek* family is, in general, a small group numerically, an inspection of Table 1 will indicate that families do show a not inconsiderable range in size. This variation results from the fact that our sample includes *bilek* families at several different stages of development, from households consisting of a single married couple at one extreme to those which extend through four consecutive generations at the other.

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In Table 2 the 107 *bilek* families of our sample have been classified according to the number of generations they contain, and for each category the main type of genealogical composition has been shown.

Table 2. *Genealogical composition of the 'bilek' family*

Number of generations in *bilek* family	Frequency	Approximate percentage of sample	Main type of genealogical composition
1	3	3%	Married couple, without children
2	43	40%	Parents with children
3	51	48%	Grandparents, child and spouse, and grandchildren
4	10	9%	Great-grandparent, child and spouse, grandchild and spouse, and great-grandchildren

It will be observed that some of the *bilek* families listed in Table 2 (i.e. those comprising two generations) are simple elementary families, but all of these are at an interjacent stage of development, and all of them—in the normal course of events—are likely to grow into three-generation families. This brings us to one of the prime features of the Iban family system.

Among the Iban, *at least one* of the children of a family, when he or she reaches maturity and marries, remains in the parents' *bilek*. All of the other children of the family may marry out, and so become members of other units, but one always stays in the natal *bilek*. In this way the Iban *bilek* family achieves a continuity through time as, from one generation to the next, one elementary family grows out of and succeeds another in an unbroken sequence.[8] This means that, in theory, every Iban *bilek* family is a perennial corporate group. In other words, although birth, adoption, marriage and death do result in regular changes in its personnel, a *bilek* does persist through time as a clearly defined entity: an estate in land and property which, at any moment, is always held in common ownership by a group of co-existing family members.

Normally, an Iban *bilek* family contains three generations, consisting, for example, of a pair of grandparents, a son or daughter and his or her spouse, and their grandchildren. The average size of families of this type is about seven members. Sometimes, four-generation families come into being, but *bileks* of this type are not common, occurring in only about 9% of cases, and almost all of them are brought about by the greater longevity of women. Three-generation *bileks* are much more usual, about 48% of families being of this type.

If a *bilek* family contains fewer than three generations this state of affairs has always been brought about in one of two ways: either by process of death,

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or by process of *bilek* partition. The first of these is self-explanatory: if all the members of the grandparent generation of a *bilek* family are removed by death, a three-generation family thus becomes a two-generation family. Partition (presently to be discussed in detail) is the process whereby a sibling secedes from his (or her) natal *bilek* to set up an independent family unit. It is a common occurrence in Iban society. The seceding group is almost always an elementary family (e.g. a sibling, his spouse and their children), though occasionally it may consist of a married couple without children. Further, for a seceding group to contain more than two generations is an exceedingly rare event.

Now, of our sample of 107 *bilek* families, forty-six (or about 43%) were groups of only one or two generations, the average size of the two-generation families being about four members. An examination of the recent histories of these forty-six *bilek* families shows that twenty-one of them have been brought into being by the death of members of the grandparent generation, so reducing them to two-generation groups, while twenty-five are cases of newly established families brought about by process of partition. In the normal course of events all of these forty-six one- and two-generation families will grow (by process of marriage and birth) into three-generation families.

The *bilek* family then is simple in its structure for it is essentially based on a direct extension of the elementary family. Iban society—as will have become apparent—is rigorously monogamous, and so there are no compound families. Again, the development of laterally extended families is precluded by a strong tendency towards partition as soon as a *bilek* family increases in size and collateral elementary families begin to emerge. Thus, in the three long-houses under discussion, there was not a single instance of married siblings both possessing adult children and yet still living together as members of the same *bilek* family. Nor did I encounter an instance of this in Iban communities in other parts of Sarawak.

BILEK FAMILY MEMBERSHIP

We have now seen that the Iban *bilek* family is an autonomous group of limited size and of simple genealogical structure. It is well possible, therefore, to define in fairly precise terms the various processes whereby a *bilek* family normally increases or—conversely—diminishes its membership. These processes are summarized in Table 3. In the discussion that follows, the most important of these processes will be reviewed.

We may begin by examining the principles of recruitment to *bilek* family membership. At any given time, any Iban man, woman or child is a resident member of one *bilek*, and one *bilek* only. He (or she) may have gained

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Table 3. *The 'bilek' family*

Processes whereby the personnel of a *bilek* family may be increased	Processes whereby the personnel of a *bilek* family may be diminished
1. By the birth of a child	1. By the death of a member
2. By the adoption of a child from another *bilek* family	2. By one of its members being adopted into another *bilek* family
3. By an individual marrying into the *bilek* (possibly with children by a previous union)	3. By a member marrying out into another *bilek* (possibly with children by a previous union)
4. By the return of an out-marrying member after divorce (possibly accompanied by children)	4. By the return of an affine to his (or her) natal *bilek* after divorce (possibly accompanied by children)
5. By amalgamation with another *bilek* family	5. By partition: the secession of some members to set up a new and independent *bilek* family

membership of this *bilek* in one of three main ways: by having been born into it, by having been adopted into it, or by having married into it. In Table 4, the 615 members of the 107 *bilek* families of Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku, have been classified under these three headings.

Table 4. *Recruitment to 'bilek' family membership*

Principle of recruitment to *bilek* family	Number of individuals	Percentage of total
Birth	418	67·9
Adoption	53	8·6
Marriage	144	23·3

Let us now glance at these different principles of recruitment.

RECRUITMENT BY BIRTH: THE PRINCIPLE OF UTROLATERAL FILIATION

Every individual in Iban society is born into one particular *bilek*, and this is just as likely to be the *bilek* of the child's father as it is to be the *bilek* of the child's mother, for virilocal residence and uxorilocal residence occur with very nearly equal incidence. An analysis of an extensive series of Iban marriages, for all of which reliable information was available, shows that virilocal residence occurred in 49% of cases as against uxorilocal residence in 51% of cases. In other words, among the Iban marriage is *utrolocal*: that is, there is a system of marriage in which *either* virilocal *or* uxorilocal residence may be followed and in which rules of kinship and inheritance result in neither form of domicile being given any special kind of preference.

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The *bilek* family of which a child is a member by right of birth, and in which he (or she) grows up, we may term his (or her) *natal bilek*. It is to this *bilek*—and this *bilek* alone—that he belongs, and he remains a member of it for the whole of his life, unless he be adopted, or, upon reaching adulthood, marries out into some other *bilek* family.

Further, membership of his (or her) natal *bilek* confers upon a child inheritance rights over its properties and lands, and these rights are retained as long as the individual remains a resident member. Among the Iban, then, filiation [9] is of a special kind, for it may be either to an individual's mother's *bilek* or to an individual's father's *bilek*, but not to both at the same time. Moreover, in practice, both types of filiation occur to an approximately equal extent. We are here confronted with a fundamental principle of the Iban family system.

To the best of my knowledge no precisely similar system of filiation has hitherto been recorded, and it becomes necessary, therefore, to introduce a new term to describe its special characteristics.

After much consideration I have decided that the best term to apply to the type of filiation found among the Iban is *utrolateral*. [10] This term has the merit that it clearly points to the fact that one side or the other is always chosen, but never both; and this is the very principle which we are wanting to define and accentuate.

By the term *utrolateral*, then, I mean to denote a system of filiation in which an individual can possess membership of either his father's or his mother's birth group (i.e. the *bilek* family among the Iban), but not of both at the same time.

It will be noted that two clearly distinct criteria are implicit in this formulation: (i) the criterion of descent, and (ii) the criterion of local residence. In theory, each child is, by birth, eligible for membership of either his father's or his mother's *bilek* family, but the necessity of a single place of local residence means that, in practice, he becomes a member of only one of these two groups. And, in any given instance, it is the type of marital domicile (either virilocal or uxorilocal) followed by the parents that determines the *bilek* family to which a child actually belongs. In short, it is filial consanguinity and local residence acting together which establish the status of the natal members of any *bilek* family.

A child, we have asserted, is just as likely, under the Iban system of filiation, to be a member of his father's birth group as he is to be a member of his mother's birth group. Evidence for this assertion is contained in Table 5. This Table has reference to *bilek* families in which there is a married couple with one or more children under twenty years of age born of their union. All such cases in the three long-houses Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku are included.

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Table 5. '*Bilek*' *family filiation*

Name of long-house	*Bilek* families in which children are living as members of their mother's birth group	*Bilek* families in which children are living as members of their father's birth group
Rumah Nyala	6	13
Rumah Sibat	10	9
Rumah Tungku	16	7
Totals	32	29

All of the household appearing in this Table were visited, and observed at first hand, during the years 1949–50. The even balancing of the two types of filiation is clearly apparent: apartments in which children are living as members of their mother's *bilek* family make up approximately 52 % of the total, while those in which children are living as members of their father's *bilek* family comprise about 48 %. This leads us to the general observation that, under the Iban family system, maternal and paternal filiation occur with virtually equal incidence, and that both kinds of filiation have the same jural and structural significance.

ADOPTION

We have now delineated the principles of filiation which hold for the natal members of a *bilek* family; exactly the same principles apply to adopted individuals. Furthermore, under Iban *adat*, an adopted child has conferred upon him precisely the same rights within his new *bilek* family as have those who are born members; and the public discussion which accompanies formal adoption is always chiefly concerned with the reiteration and exemplification of this basic rule. The occasion is also marked by ritual observances[11] which are a graphic symbolic expression of the fact that adoption involves the cessation of membership rights in the child's natal apartment and the assumption of exactly similar rights in his adoptive *bilek* family.

Adoption is widely prevalent in Iban society, occurring in about one-third of all apartments. Thus, the fifty-three cases of adoption (recorded in Table 4) were distributed in thirty-nine (or about 36 %) of the *bilek* families of our sample.

The reasons for this heavy incidence of adoption are to be sought partly in demographic factors, and partly in the jural character of the *bilek* family. Among the Iban the marriage rate is extremely high. Indeed, from my observations in the Baleh region, it can be said that all normal individuals become married at some stage of their lives, though for a not inconsiderable proportion a state of permanent divorce eventually ensues. However, despite this high marriage rate, childless unions—resulting either from infant mortality or sterility—are fairly common. Inquiries at Rumah Nyala[12]

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958. CC6 Iban CC6

showed an infant mortality rate (i.e. death at birth or within the first five years of life) of approximately 0·4; and from investigations carried out at all the long-houses of our sample it would appear that about 18% of women reach menopause without having raised children of their own.[13] These are the women who, lacking issue of their own, have recourse to adoption.

Mention has already been made of the way in which an Iban family normally persists through time as an allodial unit. If this process is to continue without intermission the family must perpetuate itself; each generation must produce or acquire the children who are to inherit the *bilek* and its heirloom property in the next. It is possible for a family to fail in this task, and so become extinct. The Iban use the word *punas*, meaning 'sterile', to describe this event, as in the phrase: '*Bilek sida udah punas*' ('Their *bilek* family has become extinct'). It must not be thought, however, that the extinction of *bilek* families is a common phenomenon; on the contrary, such a happening is extremely rare, for every effort is made to avoid so ignominious a fate. In the last resort, the one or two survivors of a depleted family will seek amalgamation with some other *bilek*, but the preferred and more usual course is to augment one's dwindling family by the adoption of new members. In most cases the risk of extinction is foreseen by many years, and young children are adopted, but it does sometimes happen that adults are adopted into a family which has been stricken by disease or some other misfortune. An analysis of the fifty-three extra-*bilek* adoptions appearing in Table 4 shows that about 70% of them had been contracted by persons having no children of their own. This percentage clearly indicates the principal motive prompting adoption.

Adoption enables childless couples to escape from their undesired predicament. Moreover, the children who are adopted, as heirs apparent, can be relied upon to care for their adoptive parents in sickness and old age, and to perform the complex mortuary rites which, in Iban eyes, are of critical importance. These duties discharged, the adopted children inherit their parents' *bilek* and all the property it contains, so ensuring its survival as an independent unit. Adoption operating in this way to save a *bilek* from extinction is a not uncommon phenomenon. Thus, of the 107 *bilek* families of Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku, seventeen (or approximately 16%) depended on an adoption for their future existence.

MARRIAGE

We have now briefly examined recruitment by birth and recruitment by adoption. Full membership of a *bilek* family may also be attained by marrying into it. Marriage, indeed, is a crucial determinant of *bilek* family membership. As already remarked, the Iban are a rigorously monogamous people, and

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further, the Iban *bilek* family—by *adat*—is a strictly exogamous unit. Iban custom does ordinarily permit the marriage of first cousins (*petunggal diri menyadi*), but incest rules prescribe that marriage between first cousins who are resident members of the same *bilek* should never take place.[14] From this fact that marriage never occurs within the confines of a single *bilek* family it follows that every marriage necessitates one of the partners leaving his or her natal or adoptive *bilek*.

This means that when he marries a man has two courses of action open to him: he may bring his wife to live as a member of his own natal or adoptive *bilek* (i.e. in-marriage), or he may move to the natal or adoptive *bilek* of his wife (i.e. out-marriage). A woman, when she marries, is faced with a similar choice: she may take up residence either in her own *bilek* or in that of her husband. Marriage accompanied by neolocal residence never occurs (Murdock 1949: 16–17).

The Iban have a special term to describe the act of marrying out of one's natal or adoptive family. It is the verb *ngugi* (root form: *ugi*), which Howell and Bailey translate as: 'to go and live in the husband's (or wife's) *bilek*' (Howell and Bailey 1900: 182). In the Baleh region the phrase *ngugi ka orang* is commonly used. These words meaning 'to go, on marriage, and reside with other people' (i.e. the *bilek* family of one's spouse), describe the process even more clearly. The term *ngugi* applies equally to males and females, and so to both virilocal and uxorilocal out-marriage.

Now, as already remarked, among the Iban virilocal marriage and uxorilocal marriage are equally permissible, for in Iban culture there are no beliefs or values which result in either form of marriage being given any sort of special preference. However, in all cases of permanent marriage a definite choice between the two possibilities must in the end be made, for there is no long-term system of alternate residence. Often, it is true, a newly married couple will follow first one form of domicile and then the other before finally settling down. Marrying into another apartment means permanently departing from one's natal or adoptive *bilek* family, and it is almost always an occasion of stress and sorrow, particularly for the parents of the seceding son or daughter. Conflicts of interest very frequently arise, but if a marriage is to endure a compromise is always reached, and, sooner or later, the couple permanently adopt either virilocal or uxorilocal residence.

Let us now consider the evidence for these assertions. Of the 140 affines listed in Table 4, sixty-five were men with uxorilocal domicile while seventy-five were women with virilocal domicile. In a more numerous series of marriages—284 in all, both past and present—taken from genealogies collected at Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku, there were 145 instances of uxorilocal residence (or 51% approximately) as against 139 instances (or 49% approximately) of virilocal residence. These evenly

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

balanced percentages are a clear demonstration of the principles we have been discussing, and, I would submit, fully justify the designation utrolocal which we have applied to the Iban system of marriage.

Let us next consider the changes in status which result from marrying out of one's natal *bilek* family. The *bilek* family, as we have established, is an autonomous corporate group, and furthermore, no man, woman or child can be a full member of more than one *bilek* family at any given time. Thus, when an individual marries into another *bilek* family this act means the relinquishment, for the time being, of all rights in his (or her) natal *bilek*, and the assumption of comparable rights in his (or her) affinal *bilek*. In other words, under Iban *adat*, marriage confers upon an affine full jural membership of his (or her) spouse's *bilek* family. These rights depend, of course, on the continuance of the marriage, and should divorce occur, an out-marrying individual normally has no recourse but to return and resume membership of his (or her) natal *bilek*. [15] But when a stable marriage ensues, an affine comes to occupy a position of equal importance to his (or her) spouse, and to possess virtually equivalent rights within the *bilek* family. Indeed, it often happens, and especially in the case of men whose prowess has brought them social prestige, that an affine comes to play the dominant role in the managing of a *bilek* family's affairs.

THE PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY INHERITANCE

Having briefly described the composition of the *bilek* family and the way in which its members are recruited, we may turn to an examination of the principles governing inheritance, for these, under the Iban system of filiation, are of particular significance. Let us begin by considering the position of the natal and adopted members of the family. As has already been stressed, children become members by right of birth of either their father's or their mother's *bilek*—but it is always one or the other. Thus, the children of a man practising uxorilocal residence are the members of their mother's natal *bilek*, and of this local group alone. They have no rights of inheritance within their father's natal *bilek*, of which they are not resident members. Similarly, the children of a woman practising virilocal residence are members of their father's local group, and have no rights of inheritance in their mother's natal *bilek*. Adopted children are members of the *bilek* into which they have been adopted, and of this *bilek* only.

The general rule for both natural and adopted children is this: as long as they remain resident members of their own *bilek* family, sons and daughters possess full and equal rights of inheritance over the family estate. In other words, within a *bilek* siblings are parceners or co-heirs. There is thus recognition of neither primogeniture nor ultimogeniture, and no differentia-

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

428 tion between the sexes, nor between natural and adopted children. Instead, in matters of inheritance, siblings are equals. Their equivalence is well expressed in the phrase: '*menyadi tampong pala*' which the Iban use to describe them. These words, which have the literal meaning: 'siblings whose heads are joined', symbolize aptly the kind of relationship in which siblings stand. Another much-used phrase is: '*menyadi begulai pemai*' meaning 'siblings of common inheritance'.

428 591 However, should a man, upon marriage, permanently leave his natal *bilek*, he thereby relinquishes his parcenary rights over its estate, but acquires rights in the *bilek* into which he marries and settles down. The same applies to a woman who marries out of her *natal* apartment. An affine, then, possesses parcenary rights within the *bilek* of which he (or she) is a resident member [16].

428 [592] We have now seen that the Iban *bilek* family is an autonomous, corporate group, all the resident members of which—natal, adopted and affinal—hold rights over its estate. As the Iban themselves put it: 'Whoever stands by the *bilek* (i.e. remains a resident member), he (or she) possesses the belongings, possesses the valuables' ('*Sapa tan ka bilek, iya empu utai, empu keresa*'). This was an utterance made at Rumah Nyala in 1950 during the formal discussion of the conditions which were to govern the adoption of an infant boy, and it was made by one of the men of the adopting family. It was a public pledge that as long as the adopted child elected to remain resident in their apartment he would possess identical rights of inheritance with the other members of the family. This fundamental principle of inheritance was reiterated many times during the course of the discussion—as it always is on such occasions. Finally, to clinch the matter, another of the adopting party put it even more trenchantly by abruptly asserting: 'Whoever stands by the *bilek*, even be he a Kayan, a Bukitan, a Punan, an Ukit, it matters not, he is the one who inherits the property' ('*Sapa tan ka bilek, Kayan, Pakatan, Punan, Ukit, enda iboh, iya empu keresa*'). Now, the Kayans, the Bukitans, the Punans and the Ukits are neighbouring tribes of the Rejang headwaters; all are alien, and the Kayans and Ukits, in particular, are the bitter traditional enemies of the Iban. When this is realized, the force of the utterance just quoted will be appreciated. It affirms that even an enemy and an alien, should he come to live in an Iban *bilek*, would, if he maintained his residence, hold equal rights of inheritance with the other members of the family. For Iban ears there could be no more emphatic avowal than this of the principle we have been considering.

As long then, as an individual remains resident in a *bilek*, he (or she) is one of the group in which ownership and inheritance are vested. Indeed, it is the family as a whole that holds common tenure of the conglomeration of property and other rights which constitute 'the *bilek*'. In other words, the Iban *bilek* family is a corporation aggregate. Thus, no one of its members holds the right

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

to disinherit another. In life the members of a *bilek* are parceners, and even in death each member is entitled to his share of the family estate—that last inheritance which he carries with him to the after-world. An elder looks to his children and to his grandchildren within the *bilek* family to care for him in his old age, and to perform conscientiously the elaborate mortuary rites which must accompany his passing from this world to the next. To the Iban these mortuary rites and the furnishing of grave goods are matters of supreme importance, and all the senior surviving members of the *bilek* family are expected to join in their faithful performance. As the Iban themselves phrase it: 'As the mortuary rites are equally performed, so equally is the *bilek* estate inherited' ('*Enti blah ngelumbong, blah empu utai*').

THE POSITION OF 'PUN BILEK'

By the death of an elder a family is depleted of one of its members, but in matters of tenancy and tenure no drastic change ensues for those who are left behind; the *bilek* is theirs, as it was before, and as before they continue to occupy it and manage its affairs. Because of this system of continuing ownership in which an apartment and all its appurtenances pass without disjunction from one generation to the next, it is always possible—as far as the memories of the Iban will permit—to trace, generation by generation, the course of succession to each *bilek* estate. Now, while all the members of a *bilek* family, at any particular time, constitute what we have called a corporation aggregate, there is always one individual who can be singled out as the senior member by right of descent. In other words, while the *bilek* family, jurally viewed, is a corporate group, it is still recognized that there is one individual from whom the ownership and inheritance rights of all the other members of the family ultimately stem, irrespective of whether these members be natal, adopted or affinal. For such a person the Iban have a special term; he (or she) is called the *pun bilek*—literally, the root, or foundation of the *bilek*.

It is, of course, possible for a pair of siblings to occupy the position of *pun bilek*, but this is a decidedly rare event, and in the three long-houses of our sample only four *bilek* (or 3·7 %) fell into this category.[17] In most instances, all but one of a group of siblings marry out (each, as presently to be explained, taking a minor share of the family's heirloom property), so leaving only one of their number to become *pun bilek*. Furthermore, when it does happen that two adult siblings elect to remain in their natal *bilek*, partition almost invariably follows; that is, the *bilek* splits into two independent sections, with one sibling in each. So, there was not, in our sample, a single case of two or more married siblings being *pun bilek* in the same apartment, nor did I encounter such an arrangement anywhere else in Sarawak.

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

From these facts it will be clear that in collecting Iban genealogies it becomes a matter of critical importance to discover, at each generation level, which members of a sibling group married out, and which of them remained in the natal *bilek*, for only in this way is it possible to identify those individuals who lived and died as members of a particular *bilek* family. This vital information also leads to the tracing of *bilek* family partition, an important process presently to be discussed.

The *pun bilek* may be looked upon, then, as the nucleus of the *bilek* family. As the senior member by virtue of descent, he (or she) is a direct link with the past, the person through whom the property and other rights acquired by former members have been handed on to the present members of the family.

Let us first consider the contemporary *pun bilek* of the 107 *bilek* families of Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku, all of whom could be identified with certainty. It will be necessary, however, to omit at this stage six *bilek* of a special kind known as *bilek berakup*. A *bilek berakup* is formed when two independent *bilek* families amalgamate to form a single unit[18], and in these cases there are always two distinct *pun bilek*—one from each of the constituent groups. The contemporary *pun bilek*, or senior members by right of descent, of the 101 remaining families are shown in Table 6.[19]

Table 6. *Contemporary 'pun bilek'*

Long-house	Males as *pun bilek*	Females as *pun bilek*	A pair of siblings as *pun bilek*
Rumah Nyala	11	12	1
Rumah Sibat	14	13	2
Rumah Tungku	20	27	1
Totals	45	52	4

Once again it will be noted that there is a fairly even balance between the sexes, females holding the position of *pun bilek* in 53·6% of cases, and males in 46·4%.

From genealogical investigation and study it is further possible to establish the identity of the former *pun bilek* of a family, and so construct what is, in effect, a kind of line of succession, though often it is only two or three generations in depth.[20] Such a line of succession includes all the previous holders of the position of *pun bilek*, and it is thus a line of all the descendants through whom the ownership rights of one particular *bilek* have been transmitted from one generation to the next. Reconstructing these lines of succession to the position of *pun bilek* is a laborious and painstaking task, but it is an imperative one for the understanding of Iban family structure. An examination of several hundred of these lines again shows that men tend to occupy the position of *pun bilek* just about as frequently as do women. Thus, although most of the lines which I collected were only three or four generations in

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 CC6 Iban CC6

length, the great majority of them (i.e. about 80%) included both males and females. In some instances, indeed, there was simple alternation: e.g. male, female, male, female. A few lines did contain four successive *pun bilek* of the same sex, but these were a distinct rarity: among the 107 *bilek* families of our sample I discovered only three instances of there having been four female *pun bilek* in succession, and only two instances of there having been four males. There is always a slight chance of this sort of succession occurring over three- or four-generation periods, but probability is against it. It can be predicted with assurance that were it possible to collect longer lines of succession, every one of them would be found to contain *pun bilek* of both sexes.

Our next Table summarizes the results of an analysis of all the different lines of succession which I was able to collect at Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku.

Table 7. '*Pun bilek*'

Long-house	Male *pun bilek*	Female *pun bilek*
Rumah Nyala	25	43
Rumah Sibat	24	34
Rumah Tungku	55	59
Totals	104	136

The percentages in this instance (i.e. females 56·6%, and males 43·4%) are not quite so evenly balanced as in the previous tables[21], but they do confirm that utrolateral filiation is a fundamental feature of Iban social structure. In theory, either males or females may occupy the position of *pun bilek*, and in practice the position is occupied by men almost as often as it is by women.

INHERITANCE AND AFFINES

The position of the natal members of a *bilek* family in regard to inheritance is clear, for their prerogative depends on direct descent. Furthermore, as we have seen, an adopted child has conferred upon him exactly the same rights. But what of an affine whose membership dates only from the time of his (or her) marriage? By way of explanation let us consider the case of a man who marries out of his natal *bilek*. When such a man decides upon uxorilocal residence, and when, in the course of time, it becomes evident to all concerned that his marriage will be a lasting one, he receives from his natal *bilek* family a form of personal inheritance called *pemai*. The amount of *pemai* given to an out-marrying member varies considerably from case to case, for it depends largely on the degree to which the other senior members of the *bilek* family approve of the marriage that has been contracted. Cases do occur in which

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

428 no *pemai* at all is given, while at the other extreme, planned marriages between members of wealthy families are often marked by a show of ostentation. Very commonly the *pemai* consists of a Chinese jar or a bronze gong, and of various smaller articles such as plates and bowls.

The giving of this *pemai* is an event of signal importance, for it constitutes the final fulfilling of a man's rights of inheritance as far as his natal *bilek* is concerned, and it further represents the formal termination of membership of his natal (or adoptive) *bilek* family. Henceforward, he is a full member of his wife's *bilek*. His *pemai*, or personal inheritance, becomes part of the estate of his wife's apartment, and all his energies are now devoted to the welfare of this new family; any valuables he may acquire (as, for example, on a *bejalai*, or journey) are the property—*meum et tuum*—of this group. In other words, when a man marries out of his own apartment and into another, he has conferred upon him full jural membership of a new corporate group, with all its attendant privileges and obligations. And the same, of course, applies to a woman.

591 Marriage then, is an event of great moment, and particularly for the spouse who is leaving his (or her) natal apartment. Out-marriage, as we have seen,
592 involves a radical change in jural status. It is also an occasion of psychological stress for the out-marrying spouse, since she (or he) is, in a sense, abandoning her natal family. Thus, one informant remarked that out-marriage (*ngugi ka orang*) meant 'the casting away of one's father and mother' ('*itong udah buai apai indai*'). However, about 75% of Iban marriages are within the
[582] kindred[22], and so the stresses of out-marriage are often allayed by the fact that the out-marrying spouse is entering the household of fairly close kin.

592 The entry into a *bilek* of a new member by marriage is commonly marked
718 by a minor but highly significant ceremony. Each Iban family possesses an heirloom plate (*pinggai asi*, lit. 'rice plate') which ranks amongst the foremost sacra of the *bilek*, and has especial symbolic importance. Usually, it hangs on one of the walls of the family apartment in a cane casing, together with augury sticks (*kayu burong*) which have been gathered, in the past, to consecrate major family undertakings. This *pinggai asi* is only used on ritual occasions, as, for example, during the rites which mark the first eating, by the assembled
[585] members of a household, of the new season's rice. When, on marriage, a new member joins a family she (or he) eats her first meal from their *pinggai asi*. When the meal is finished, the plate is at once turned upside down on the mat, and a prayer is uttered, beseeching that both spouses will live in health,
[789] prosperity and happiness. The over-turning of the plate is a magical act symbolizing the anchoring or fastening in the apartment of its new member. Thus, according to the Iban, the intention of the rite is to prevent the new member fretting about her (or his) natal *bilek* ('*ngambi iya badu betati ka bilek diri empu*').

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

THE FAMILY SYSTEM OF THE IBAN OF BORNEO

If the marriage be a successful one, an affine is gradually absorbed, psychologically, into his (or her) new *bilek* family. As an example of this process let me cite the case of Gering, a young woman who, in 1941, left her natal long-house (in the Sungai Melinau) and married into a *bilek* family of Rumah Nyala (in the Sungai Sut). Gering relates that when she first came to Rumah Nyala she was very unhappy, and always pining for the *bilek* she had left behind; at night she often wept—especially when it thundered, for thunder can be a portent that one's close kin are suffering sickness or hurt. The fact that her natal long-house was two to three days' travel away—and arduous travel by way of rivers broken by hazardous rapids—made her situation even more desolate; but within a year of her marriage a son was born, and gradually Gering became resigned to her lot. By 1950, with two sons of her own, Gering had grown fully accustomed to life at Rumah Nyala. Indeed, when we took her back on a visit to her natal *bilek*, she said that it seemed, because of her long absence, to be 'like the *bilek* of strangers' (*'asai bilek orang laban lama'*), and she was more than happy to return to her husband's apartment. When we did arrive back at Rumah Nyala, Gering told us she felt really at home again: it was, she remarked 'as if her mother-in-law had become her mother'. Another informant observed that a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law (*menantu*) is thought of as being 'half a child' (*'itong ke tengah anak'*); and I also heard it said that when a marriage occurs the parents-in-law 'adopt their *menantu* (son-in-law or daughter-in-law) as the twin of their own child' (*'ngambo menantu ka sapit anak'*). All of these statements are evidence of the deep significance of the change which marriage brings about in the status of an out-marrying individual.

IBAN MORTUARY CUSTOMS AND INHERITANCE

Further evidence of the status of affines in the Iban *bilek* family is to be had from an examination of Iban death customs and of the position of widows and widowers.

The Iban have an absolute and fervent belief in the immortality of the soul and in the existence of an after-world, which they call Sabayan. To this shadowy land go the souls of all the Iban dead—men, women and children. It is also an unshakeable Iban belief that all objects possess separable soul-counterparts, called *semengat*, and the Iban are utterly convinced that any article can be taken to the after-world in the form of its soul-counterpart. Sabayan, indeed, is looked upon as being an almost exact replica of this world, and it is the solemn duty of the living to equip the dead for their future existence. So it is that every dead person is furnished with burial property, or *baiya*. This burial property includes an exceedingly wide range of objects, from clothing, ornaments, weapons, tools, cooking utensils and rice seed, to

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

precious beads, jars, gongs and fabrics. All of these things are either buried with the corpse, or left lying on the surface of the grave; and it is believed that all of them—in the shape of their soul-counterparts—are carried to the after-world by the soul of the dead man. He is helped in this task by a band of already departed kinsfolk (*antu Sabayan*), who come to offer their assistance, and to guide the soul on its ghostly journey to Sabayan.

The provision of adequate burial property is, to the Iban, a major responsibility. It is, in fact, a final inheritance: the equipping of a person with all the necessaries of social and economic life in the after-world.

Should a child die, it is the duty of the remaining members of the natal (or adoptive) *bilek* family to provide the burial property. What happens in the case of an adult? The answer to this question is clearly of importance to our analysis, for it will give an indication of the status of the affinal members in a *bilek* family. The rule is a simple one: a man's burial property is provided by the *bilek* family of which he was a resident member at the time of his death, irrespective of whether it was his natal apartment or the apartment of which he had become a member through marriage. This rule applies even though the marriage was a very recent one, and it refers equally to men and to women. In this all-important matter then, marriage is as much an arbiter of status and eligibility as are birth and adoption.

WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS

Finally, let us glance at the position of widows and widowers, and, in particular, let us examine the rights in respect of inheritance of those widows and widowers who are also affines, for these rights—as we shall see—are of especial significance. I would claim, indeed, that the examination of the position held by affinal widows and widowers is a crucial stage in the analysis of any corporate kin group.

In societies based on the principle of unilateral filiation affines commonly hold rights of a limited kind. In most patrilineal societies, for example, a woman even though practising virilocal residence, still retains membership and other rights within her natal lineage. The position of such a woman is made plain when she becomes a widow: in some patrilineal societies the levirate is practised, but in others a widow returns to resume residence as a member of her birth group. In Iban society, which is organized on other principles, the case is entirely different, and neither of these things happens. Among the Iban, a widow has every right to stay on as a member of her deceased husband's *bilek*, and, indeed, it is her acknowledged obligation to do so. True enough, in the event of death occurring in the very early stages of a marriage, a woman may perhaps elect—after the proper rites have been observed—to return to her natal apartment, but in all cases where the marriage

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

has been well established, and especially if there are children, there is an extremely strong tendency for wives to remain. And the same applies to a widower who has been practising uxorilocal marriage.

In the three long-houses Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku there were, in all, fifty-two widows and widowers. Analysis shows that of these, twenty-six were widows and widowers living as members of their natal *bileks*, and twenty-six were widows or widowers in *bileks* of which they were members by right of marriage and prolonged local residence. Moreover, in the 107 *bilek* families of our sample, there was only one instance of a widow who had returned to her natal apartment, and she was a young woman of about twenty-two years, whose husband had died after she had been married for only four months.

These facts and figures are further evidence that when a man marries out of his natal *bilek* family and into that of his wife he acquires full jural membership of this affinal *bilek*. And the same thing happens when a woman marries out of the *bilek* into which she was born, and takes up virilocal residence. In summary then, we may say that in Iban society marriage involves a radical change in group membership for all out-marrying individuals, for within the *bilek* family marriage confers jural status just as do birth and adoption.

PARTITION

As the analysis so far has indicated, the Iban *bilek* family is a corporate group, holding property and other rights in absolute ownership. It has also been established that within the *bilek* family siblings have equivalent rights; in other words, they are parceners, or co-heirs. Implicit in this situation is the possibility that an adult sibling may claim his (or her) share of the family estate, secede from the ancestral *bilek*, and set up a separate domestic unit. This is exactly what does happen; and, indeed, it is a common occurrence in Iban society.[23]

The process is, I think, best described as *partition*, for what happens is the division of a *bilek* into two distinct parts, each part becoming an autonomous unit in its own right. The Iban term describing this event is *kadiri*, which means 'to become separate'. The fundamental feature of the process is that each part, after partition has occurred, is a fully independent entity, and not merely a constituent segment of some wider corporate group. The partition of *bilek* families as it occurs in Iban society is thus a distinctly different process from segmentation as it occurs in societies based on unilineal principles. In these societies—whether patrilineal or matrilineal—segments are always, in some degree, component parts of a more inclusive lineage or clan, and within the society as a whole the status of each segment is determined by its relative position within this hierarchical system.[24] In Iban society, on the

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other hand, although *bilek* families are always linked by cognatic ties, they are fully autonomous units both socially and jurally, and of independent and equal status. The distinction may be summed up by saying that whereas the segments of a lineage are a system of aliquot parts, Iban *bilek* families—resulting from partition—are a series of discrete units.

Let us now examine the process of partition more closely. As we have already noted, the Iban *bilek* family is a corporation aggregate, all the *bilek* property and other rights being held in common by all members of the family. This does not mean, of course, that there is no concept of personal property. A man's clothes are his own, as are his various accoutrements and most of the weapons he uses; and in the same way, a woman has her own garments and jewellery. But all the really valuable possessions (*peseka*) of the *bilek*, made up of bronze gongs and cannons, Chinese jars, plates and bowls, woven fabrics, beads and ceremonial attire, trophy heads, charms and other sacra, plantations of fruit trees and tracts of rice land, are held in common family ownership. For any particular *bilek*, most of this property will have been acquired by past generations of the family, but the present members will also have contributed their share. All the members of a family, as we have seen, work together to grow the rice and other foods they require, for in this, as in all economic pursuits, they co-operate to form a single producing and consuming unit. So, whenever the rice crop is an abundant one, part of the surplus is always used to purchase property for the *bilek*, and, similarly, the men of the family, when they undertake their expeditions (*bejalai*)—whether inland to gather jungle produce, or to the coast to work for wages—are expected to return home with some article of value to add to the common inheritance.

This system of common ownership, production and consumption by the *bilek* family works satisfactorily enough as long as the group remains restricted in numbers. In the case of small families, such as those consisting of a man, his wife and their children, it is, indeed, an ideal arrangement, for there is a complete concurrence of interests. But later in the history of such a household stresses very frequently develop. In most families one at least of the children marries out, and so attains membership of some other apartment; but it often happens that two or more of the other sons and daughters elect to remain as members of their natal *bilek*. Should two of these siblings become married while still residing in their natal *bilek*, processes are set in train which almost inevitably end in partition.

Within the *bilek* family siblings are equals, owning the same rights and obligations, and as such they are joined by strong bonds of solidarity. But when, in the course of time, these siblings marry and children are born, this results in the intrusion of new and rival loyalties. The *bilek* family is no longer a simple group, for it now contains within its boundaries two different

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elementary families, and when two elementary families emerge within the confines of the same apartment there is a very strong tendency for their interests to diverge.

This divergence is prompted by many different factors. Between families sharing the same *ménage* and the same cramped quarters, disagreements and misunderstandings readily arise. There are, for example, numerous occasions for partiality and favouritism, and these easily lead to heart-burning and resentment. A man returning from a journey to the coast brings back more and much better gifts for his own wife and children than he does for his sister and her children, and so breaks the rule that within the *bilek* there should be equal sharing. Or there arises the more serious complaint that one couple are not participating as they should in the arduous work of rice farming, on which the very subsistence of the *bilek* depends. A wife, on some pretext or other, shirks part of the back-breaking task of weeding, and her husband's sister broods over it as she toils in the heat of the sun. A younger brother-in-law is always gadding off on journeys and neglecting the sterner and duller work of farming. Such defections from corporate obligations may take many forms, for among the Iban personal inclination is given unusually free rein, but almost always they refer in some way to unequal participation in work and the unequal sharing of its fruits, and these we may single out as the basic sources of dissatisfaction. [25]

Very often partition is preceded by disagreements which culminate in quarrelling. The beginnings are usually small, and their accretion gradual, but aggravation follows aggravation until at last the storm breaks. One of the wives of a *bilek* finds her position intolerable; she whispers her complaints to others in the long-house, and before long her barbed words of condemnation percolate back to the person against whom they were directed. In retaliation the process is repeated, until at last there is quarrelling and an open breach in the family. According to the Iban themselves, resentment (*pedis ati*) at the words and behaviour of some other member of the *bilek* is the circumstance which most often precipitates partition. My own observations fully bore out this conclusion that disagreements and discord are closely associated with the break-up of *bilek* families, but it is important to note that they are almost always the outcome of stresses implicit in the existence of two elementary families in the same household. Furthermore, when quarrelling does occur between the elementary families of a *bilek* it is usual to find that one or both of the two affinal members are involved. This leads us to the heart of the matter. A group of unmarried siblings have a united interest in the welfare of their natal *bilek*, and it is only by marriage that the opportunity to set up separate apartments is created. When siblings who are members of the same *bilek* do marry, their unity is at once threatened by the rival loyalty which they now have towards their spouses, and this incipient cleavage, which is

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592 accentuated by the arrival of children and the setting up of families, almost always ends in complete separation. In other words, when they exist within the same *bilek*, the sibling tie and the conjugal tie are opposed forces—the one centripetal, or tending to hold the *bilek* together, and the other centrifugal or tending to split it into separate parts. In the great majority of cases, it is the conjugal tie which proves the stronger, and eventually causes the *bilek* to sub-divide.

This is borne out by an analysis of the composition of *bilek* families at the time when partition occurs. In the three long-houses of our sample there were thirty-six *bileks* which had sub-divided, and approximately 80 % of these were *bileks* which contained two married siblings (and their spouses) at the time when partition took place. In each case one of the couples (accompanied by their children, where these existed) broke away to set up an apartment of their own. This percentage is evidence which supports our conclusion that divergence or conflict of interest between the families of siblings is a preponderating factor in the process of *bilek* partition.

592 But what of families with no recent record of partition? Does it ever happen
596 that married siblings do manage to achieve an harmonious and enduring partnership as members of the same *bilek*? My observations, both in the Third and Second Divisions of Sarawak, suggest that it is very rare for such a thing to happen. For more than two married siblings to occupy the same *bilek* is an entirely unheard-of event; and in the three Baleh long-houses of our sample there were only eight out of a total of 107 *bileks* in which a pair of married siblings were living as members of the same household. This is a small enough proportion, but far from all of these *bileks* could be characterized as stable groups. In two instances partition was actually in the course of being arranged when I left the Baleh region in 1951, and, in addition, there were two marginal cases in which, following temporary stability, there were discernible signs that partition was impending. In three of the other *bileks* one of the marriages was very recent and it was too early to descry any developments one way or the other. The remaining case was the only really stable and long-standing sibling partnership in the three communities, and it was an unusual one in which two sisters had taken as their husbands two brothers from a neighbouring long-house. [26]

For a pair of married siblings to be members of the same *bilek* family is, then, a rare event, occurring in not more than about 5 % of all *bileks*. Furthermore, a study of the eight examples we have just discussed and of a series of other recent cases of partition, strongly suggests that even when a pair of married siblings do achieve an amicable partnership, it seldom lasts for more than about ten years. As soon as the two couples have established thriving families of their own, the desire for independence is too strong to be resisted, and the families separate, each to seek its individual fortune. The positive

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advantages of independence are many. Having a *bilek* of their own gives a man and his wife the opportunity to live and work without interference, and in the knowledge that they will not have to share the fruits of their labours with others. To the Iban, who are nothing if not calculating and ambitious individualists, this is an immense attraction. We may say then, that with singularly few exceptions the emergence of two elementary families within the same *bilek* eventually leads to partition. Indeed, the process is so widely prevalent, and so regular, that it may be cited as a sociological principle, and singled out as one of the fundamental features of Iban social structure.

THE PROCESS OF PARTITION

I have described partition as an event which occurs with remarkable regularity in certain social situations, but this is not to suggest that it is, in any sense, an automatic process, like, for example, the fission of cells. The partition of a *bilek* only occurs when a certain section of its members decide for definite reasons to break away and set up a separate apartment of their own. Acts of choice and decision are always involved, even though they are always within the narrow range of alternatives permitted by the structure of Iban society. This leads us to the very important point that when a *bilek* family divides into two groups one of them is always the instigating group—the group, that is, whose actions precipitate the process of partition, and whose insistence brings it to fulfilment. This instigating group is always the one which breaks away physically to build, and then to occupy, a new residential apartment of the long-house. Again, almost without exception, its members are younger than the oldest individual of the group which is left in possession of the ancestral *bilek* of the family.

In discussing partition it will be convenient, therefore, to refer to the instigating and seceding group as the junior section of the family, and to the passive and stationary group as the senior section.

A further point of importance is that the junior or seceding section usually has fewer members than the senior section. Thus analysis shows that, on the average, a *bilek* family contains about eight or nine members at the time when partition occurs, with the senior section having five or six, and the junior section three or four members. We may say then, that the predominant pattern of *bilek* partition is for a junior and minor group to secede from a senior and major group.

As its limited size suggests, the seceding section is generally a very simple group, consisting—in the great mass of cases—of a married couple and their children. In short, partition is predominantly concerned with small and newly founded families that decide to break away, to build a home of their own, and to manage their own affairs.

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592 This brings us to another fundamental feature of the Iban family system. It will be obvious that partition is out of the question if a family has only one child, for this individual is then the sole heir. In other words, partition only occurs when a *bilek* family contains two or more siblings. Furthermore, without exception, a brother or sister of the seceding sibling is always left behind in the ancestral *bilek*.[27] This permits us to formulate the general rule that partition always involves the break-up of a sibling group. Here, I would submit, we have a principle of cardinal importance, for it defines in precise terms the essential character of *bilek* family partition as it exists among the Iban.

Summarily then, we may say that partition consists of the secession of a son (or daughter), with spouse and children, from his (or her) natal *bilek*, this natal *bilek* being left in the possession of his (or her) parents and their remaining children and grandchildren.

THE DIVISION OF THE FAMILY ESTATE

592 421 A brief word may now be said concerning the way in which the partition of a *bilek* estate is achieved. Under Iban *adat*, the *bilek* is, in general, a partible estate. Thus, as we have seen, should a sibling and spouse elect to part company with the other members of the family, it is recognized that they have a lawful and undeniable claim to a proportionate share of the conglomeration of property and other rights which make up the inheritable possessions of the *bilek*. But there are certain exceptions of the greatest consequence, for two ritual objects, in particular, are strictly non-partible. Both are associated with the growing of rice.

592 778 In Iban eyes, rice (*padi*) is by far the most precious thing which they possess: it is the main source from which wealth flows, and upon its successful cultivation all well-being depends. To the Iban, however, the cultivation of rice is not so much a problem in agricultural method as a problem in ritual knowledge and skill. Their *padi*, so the Iban believe, is a spirit, and a farmer's success depends pre-eminently on his ability to order his dealings with the *padi* spirits in such a way as to win their approval, and so to attract to himself the bountiful crops that all men desire. To this end, the Iban have, through the centuries, devised a series of most elaborate rites. Almost all of these rites are focused upon a strain of sacred rice known as *padi pun*. Each year a tiny patch of this sacred rice is sown in the centre of the farm clearing, and there is performed the intricate sequence of magico-religious rituals upon which rests the fertility of all the *padi* that has been planted. Here, however, we are concerned only with the fact that every *bilek* family has its own particular variety of sacred rice. Unlike ordinary kinds of rice, *padi pun* is never sold or given away, for this would be to dissipate its magical efficacy

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acquired during the countless rituals carried out by past generations. In addition to its *padi pun*, a *bilek* family also possesses three or four subsidiary strains of sacred rice. These are termed *sangking*, and each year they are sown in small plots immediately surrounding the *padi pun* itself. Although all rituals are focused primarily on the *padi pun*, the several *sangking* also fall within their ambit. As one Iban put it, it is rather as though the *padi pun* were the eldest of a band of brothers.

It is one of the axioms of Iban *adat* that the *padi pun* of a *bilek* is non-partible. What then is the solution when a family sub-divides into two separate households? Briefly it is this: the senior section retains possession of the *padi pun*, while the seceding section is presented with one of the *sangking*, which is then elevated to become its *padi pun*. Here, clearly, we have a criterion of crucial importance for the study of the process of *bilek* family formation in Iban society. The senior section of a family is always definable by the fact that its *padi pun* was inherited as *padi pun*; while the *padi pun* of a seceding section is always inherited as *sangking*. By studying the inheritance of *padi pun* and *sangking*, therefore, it is possible to establish the main line of a family, and the various offshoots from it which have been brought about by partition.

A second non-partible object is the *batu pemanggol*, or ritual whetstone, which is the centre-piece of the rites that initiate the yearly farming cycle. Each *bilek* family possesses one of these stones which is cherished as a magical charm of most vital importance. A few Iban families, indeed, still have whetstones upon which human victims—captives taken in war—were once sacrificed. Such stones are called *batu jaum*, and are immeasurably valuable in Iban estimation. To divide a *batu pemanggol* would be to destroy it, and so, when partition takes place, it is always retained in the ancestral *bilek*. The seceding section, seeking an auspicious occasion, gathers a suitable-looking stone from the river bed. With a great show of solemnity, the new stone is touched on the old and then consecrated; tutelary spirits are invoked and offerings made, and finally a pig or cock is sacrificed and the blood allowed to run on the stone's surface. This stone then becomes the *batu pemanggol* of the seceding section.

When partition occurs then, the senior section of the family always retains the ancestral sacred rice and ritual whetstone. It may also happen that a *bilek* possesses some other unique magical or ritual object and, if this be the case, this too is retained by the senior section. With these exceptions, however, all the other property of the *bilek* is partible, and its apportionment is in accord with the relative size and the composition of the two sections resulting from the partition, following the general rule that siblings are parceners.

More often than not the apportionment of the *bilek* property is carried out by the siblings and others concerned in private conference. But cases do

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592 627 occasionally happen in which feelings run so high that agreement cannot be reached, and in this event the *tuai rumah* and other elders of the long-house are called in to act as assessors and adjudicators. They meet in the apartment of the family concerned, where all the non-personal, inheritable property has been heaped up in the centre of the room. All the members of the family are present and the composition of the two sections seeking partition is well known to all taking part. After a brief interchange of views the value of the various items of the assembled property is formally assessed and they are then all allotted in the proper proportions to the two sections. In addition to the adjudicating elders there are always a number of other outside witnesses and so the partition becomes a final and binding settlement. The occasion concludes by one of the elders waving a cock, in blessing, over the divided sections of the family, and uttering a prayer that henceforward they will live in concord and their affairs prosper.

592 Finally, there is one further aspect of the process of *bilek* partition that deserves mention. It has been shown that the *pun bilek* of a family—the senior member by right of descent—may be either a man or a woman, and that, in fact, males and females occupy the position of *pun bilek* to an approximately equal extent. It has also been remarked that when partition takes place the seceding section always contains a sibling. This individual, it will be clear, is the *pun bilek* of the new apartment. Now, in Iban society, siblings are equals and co-heirs, and again, in matters of tenancy and tenure, there is no differentiation of rights in terms of sex. From these principles one would infer that when partition occurs there is an equal likelihood of a daughter seceding from her ancestral *bilek* as there is of a son seceding. This inference is well borne out by the facts. In the three long-houses, Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku, there were thirty-six cases of partition, all of which had occurred during the lifetime of one of the members of the *bileks* concerned. Table 8 presents an analysis of the status of the *pun bilek* of the seceding sections in these thirty-six cases of partition.

Table 8. *'Pun bilek' of seceding sections in 'bilek' family partition*

Long-house	Male *pun bilek*	Female *pun bilek*	Two brothers as *pun bilek*	Brother and sister as *pun bilek*
Rumah Nyala	4	1	–	–
Rumah Sibat	6	7	1	1
Rumah Tungku	7	9	–	–
Totals	17	17	1	1

It will be seen that there were two instances in which the seceding section contained a pair of siblings: a brother and sister in one instance, and a pair of brothers in the other. In thirty-four cases, however, the seceding section

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contained only one sibling. It is noteworthy that of these seventeen were daughters who had seceded from their ancestral *bileks* and seventeen were sons. Here again we are confronted with that equal balancing between the sexes which is such a salient feature of the Iban family system.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this essay has been mainly descriptive: the presentation in succinct terms of the principal features of what is, I believe, a theoretically significant type of family structure. Radcliffe-Brown and others have frequently pointed to the special interest of the cognatic family and kinship systems found in the societies of Malaysia, but as yet our understanding of them is very limited. To the best of my knowledge this is the first time that a family system of the Iban type has been described, but there are good grounds for supposing that closely similar systems are to be found elsewhere in Borneo as well as in other parts of Malaysia.

Our analysis has directed particular attention to the principle of utrolateral filiation on which the Iban family system rests. That is, in Iban society, a child is always a member of either its father's or its mother's natal *bilek*, depending on whether its parents practice virilocal or uxorilocal marriage; it is never a member of both their *bileks*, but always of one or the other. Furthermore, filiation to the paternal *bilek* and filiation to the maternal *bilek* occur with very nearly equal incidence. It has also been stressed that an essential feature of the Iban system is the existence of a clearly defined local entity—the *bilek* estate—to which individuals are filiated or attached. In other words, membership of the Iban *bilek* family is based partly on descent and partly on local residence, and it is these two principles working together which produce what we have called a system of utrolateral filiation. This fact that the *bilek* is invariably a single local unit is intrinsic to Iban family organization. Indeed, one might put forward the view that it is only by the recognition of some criterion of local residence that corporate kin groups can be formed in societies based on cognatic principles.

Of the complex inter-relationships which link the *bilek* families of a long-house community little has been said: this is an aspect of Iban social organization which must be discussed on another occasion. In this essay we have been concerned solely with the *bilek* family. That the *bilek* family merits this concern there can be small doubt, for, as we have seen, it is the basic corporate kin group of Iban society. In the words of Temenggong Jugah: 'Among us Iban each *bilek* is like a sovereign country.'

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J. D. FREEMAN

A NOTE ON PARTITION AND OUT-MARRIAGE AND THE SIZE OF THE SIBLING GROUP

592 582 A special problem with which one has to deal in attempting to explain the working of the Iban family system is the differential incidence of out-marriage and partition. An obvious way of coping with this question is to examine a series of different sibling groups and to determine, for each of them, the relative incidence of out-marriage, adoption out of the *bilek*, and *bilek* partition.

One necessary condition for a survey of this kind is that all the sibling groups considered should have reached a stage at which all of the processes to be examined had reached a state of completion.

Accordingly, I extracted from my collection of genealogies for R. Nyala, R. Sibat and R. Tungku, all the available cases of this kind. This gave me ninety-eight sibling groups in all—ranging in size from one to nine members.

For all of these ninety-eight groups I noted the instances of out-marriage, adoption out, and partition—where they occurred—and then tabulated the results. The results for out-marriage and partition are tabulated in the diagram opposite.

Along the horizontal axis of the graph the ninety-eight sibling groups of the sample are arranged in order of size from one to nine; and along the vertical axis frequencies are shown as percentages, cases of out-marriage, as they occurred, as a percentage of all possible cases; cases of partition, as they occurred, as a percentage of the total number of cases of partition which might have occurred.

The diagram can be summarized verbally, as follows:

Size of sibling group	ref.: out-marriage and partition
1	Partition never occurs; out-marriage is exceedingly rare (5 % of cases); (i.e. sole heir always remains in natal *bilek*, except in highly rare and unusual circumstances).
2	Out-marriage and partition *about equal* (e.g. 47 %: 44 %).
3	Out-marriage *slightly more common* than partition (e.g. 53 %: 37 %).
4	Out-marriage *about twice as common* as partition (e.g. 66 %: 29 %).
5	Out-marriage remains *markedly* more common than partition (e.g. about twice as common).

Let us now glance at the phenomenon of out-marriage.

OUT-MARRIAGE

We can, I think, on the evidence from our sample of ninety-eight sibling groups, make a generalization something of this kind:

The incidence of marriage out of natal *bilek* families (i.e. into other *bilek* families) exhibits a slight tendency to progressive increase as the size of sibling groups (in *bilek* families) progressively increases.

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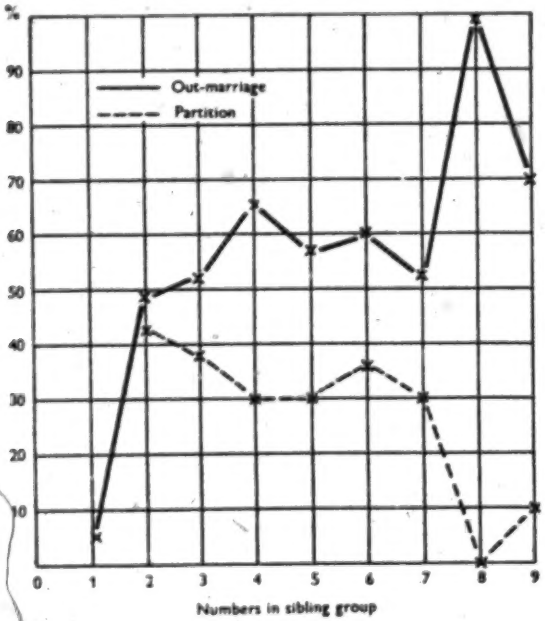
(E.g. from an average incidence of 48% in the case of sibling groups of two members to an average incidence of 60% in the cases of sibling groups of five and over.)

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS OF THIS TENDENCY

(1) As a sibling group increases in numbers the potential share of any one individual of the *bilek* estate decreases. (E.g. sole heir inherits whole of estate, two children inherit half each, three one-third each, and so on.) This means that as a



sibling group increases in size it becomes increasingly less 'worth while' for any member of the group to remain in his natal *bilek*, with the intention of claiming his share of the *bilek* estate. In other words, it is more 'worth while' (i.e. in his material, social and other interests) for any member of a large sibling group to marry out of his natal *bilek* and into another with only one or two members in its sibling group. He thus tends to inherit more property; and to acquire, as a result of this, greater social and ritual standing and influence.

(*Note.* To test this notion I made a separate analysis of all cases of males who had married into *bilek* families in which the potential *pun bilek* was an only daughter. There were nine such cases. It is, I think, significant that the average size of the sibling groups of these nine males was 6·3 members, whereas the average for the sample as a whole was 3·6.)

(2) The male members of large sibling groups are presented with greater opportunities for going on *bejalai* because their services in farming are not so vitally

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required. This presents them with greater opportunities for meeting nubile females and settling down in other areas. The inducement for such males to return to a large *bilek* family is not so great.

(3) All Iban apartments are of about the same size. As a large family grows up living in this confined space becomes increasingly uncongenial. For members of large families out-marriage is the easiest avenue of escape. (Partition is a much more difficult operation, for other members of the sibling group may offer opposition, etc.)

(4) The aim of most Iban men and women is to possess a *bilek* of their own. This confers the independence which is dear to every Iban's heart. Out-marriage is an easier avenue to this independence than partition.

PARTITION

The incidence of partition exhibits a tendency to progressive decrease as the size of sibling groups progressively increases. (E.g. from an average incidence of 44% in the case of sibling groups of two to three members to an average incidence of 21% in the case of sibling groups of five and over.)

SUGGESTED EXPLANATIONS

These, in general, are the converse of what has been said for out-marriage.

When a sibling group is small in size (two to three members) the share of the family estate available to a sibling is sufficiently large (i.e. one-half to one-third) to provide strong inducement. As a sibling group increases in size, however, the share available to a sibling desiring partition becomes progressively less, so offering less inducement towards partition. Because of this, out-marriage offers stronger inducements as the size of the sibling group increases. So the incidence of partition decreases and the incidence of out-marriage increases as the size of the sibling group increases.

NOTES

[1] The Iban are also sometimes called Sea Dayaks. In Sarawak it so happened that the first Iban with whom the British came into contact (in the early 1840's) were certain groups of warriors, who, in league with Malays, had become addicted to coastal piracy. Understandably enough they were given the name of Sea Dayaks. However, from an ecological point of view the term Sea Dayak is inaccurate and misleading: the vast majority of the Iban have always been a hill people, living many miles from the coast, and their economy is essentially an agricultural one. The name Iban (which was introduced to ethnographical literature by Haddon in 1901) has now achieved general acceptance (Haddon 1901: 325).

[2] For an account of the Iban migrations into the Baleh region see Freeman 1955: 11 ff.

[3] I would like to express my most sincere thanks to the Colonial Social Science Research Council under whose auspices my field research was carried out.

[4] *Kami* is the personal pronoun: we, plural (excluding the person or persons addressed).

[5] Temenggong Jugah, of Sungai Merirai, Baleh region. Temenggong Jugah was one of the Colony of Sarawak's representatives at the Coronation of Her Majesty

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Queen Elizabeth II. I was fortunate in that he was able to spend some time with me in Cambridge, where we renewed our friendship and discussed together the results of my analysis of Iban society.

[6] *Rumah* is the Iban word for a long-house; to this is added the name of the current *tuai rumah*, or headman of the community, e.g. Nyala.

[7] The average for Pengulu Jenggut's district (lower Batang Baleh and Sungai Sut) was 5·78 persons per *bilek*; while that for Pengulu Grinang's district (upper Batang Baleh and Sungai Gat) was also 5·75. These figures, which are for 1948, were obtained from official records at Kapit fort.

[8] It is, of course, possible for a *bilek* to become extinct because of an epidemic or some other natural catastrophe, but this—despite the hazardous environment to which the Iban are exposed—is an exceedingly rare happening.

[9] By filiation I mean to denote the system whereby an individual establishes membership of a structurally continuing group by virtue of birth (or adoption), and with reference to one of his (or her) parents (cf. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'filiation, the fact of being the child of a specified parent').

[10] From the Latin, *uter*, either of two, one or the other, one of two.

[11] The *nusop ayu* ritual, the main design of which is the 'transplanting' of the adopted child's *ayu*, or 'soul' in the same clump as the *ayu* of the members of his adoptive *bilek* family.

[12] Based on investigation of the reproductive histories of thirty-four women of Rumah Nyala; inquiries conducted at other long-houses of the Baleh region showed closely comparable results. For conducting these, as many other inquiries, I am deeply indebted to my wife.

[13] Based on interviews with seventy-seven women (all of whom had passed menopause) of Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku.

[14] It is, in fact, rare in Iban society for first-cousins to be members of the same *bilek* family. Cases do occur of young children who are first-cousins occupying the same *bilek*, but by the time they have reached puberty, partition has almost always taken place. In only one of the 107 *bileks* of our sample did the possibility of first-cousin intra-*bilek* incest exist; moreover first-cousins of this kind have grown up, in the same household, to look upon one another as siblings, and between them sexual relations or marriage would be unthinkable.

[15] Cases do very occasionally occur in which a natal spouse will, following divorce (usually instigated by adultery), move to another apartment; in such instances the deserted affinal spouse will usually stay on in the *bilek* of which he (or she) is a member by right of marriage. This and other happenings associated with divorce are of especial interest, but in a summary essay of this kind it is not possible to give them the detailed discussion they deserve.

[16] The nature of an affine's rights depend, as might be expected, on duration of residence. In the event of early divorce they are, of course, abrogated, but should a man die in his wife's *bilek*, he is treated in the provision of grave goods and the like just as though he were a natal member. This point will be taken up when we come to discuss the position of widows and widowers.

[17] In three of these instances only one of the siblings was married, while the other was single; and the fourth case was that of two sisters both of whom were divorcees.

[18] Amalgamation is a rare event, for it is only resorted to when one or both of the two *bileks* concerned are in such a straitened state as to make independent survival either difficult or impossible. The most common cause is the reduction of the personnel of a *bilek* by death.

[19] In all cases of affinal widows or widowers and their children succeeding, the *bilek* has been reckoned as 'belonging' to the dead spouse—the last determinable *pun bilek*.

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

[20] The Iban of the Baleh region make no attempt to preserve lengthy genealogies and the longest line of succession that I collected was one of five generations, including the *pun bilek* who was still living. The Iban, in their bilateral society, are much more interested in the spread or scatter of relationships, where—in the absence of exact genealogical knowledge—they are guided by their classificatory system of kinship.

[21] That the proportions do not, in practice, work out as equally as one would predict from theoretical premises is significant, for it indicates that males marry out of their natal *bileks* slightly more often than do females. This tendency—running counter to complete utrolaterality—is probably to be accounted for by the fact that whereas Iban men regularly travel far away from their homes and so visit many other long-houses, where marriages are likely to be contracted, the womenfolk undertake such journeys very rarely indeed.

[22] I am using kindred in the same sense as W. H. R. Rivers: 'a group consisting of persons related to one another, other than by marriage, through both father and mother' (Rivers 1924: 16).

[23] For example, thirty-six of the 107 *bilek* families of our sample had come into being by process of partition during the lifetime of one of their living members.

[24] As, for example, among the Tallensi: '. . . every minimal lineage is a segment of a more inclusive lineage defined by reference to a common grandfather, and this, in turn, is a segment of a still wider lineage defined by reference to a common great-grandfather; and so on until the limit is reached—the maximal lineage, defined by reference to the remotest agnatic ancestor of the group' (Fortes 1945: 31).

[25] So Temenggong Jugah (of Sungai Merirai), a most intelligent Iban leader, gives as the main sources of *bilek* family partition: '*ari begarih*', and '*ari enggai besangkong*'. '*Ari begarih*' means 'from claiming more than one's fair share, from dividing something unequally'; while '*ari enggai besangkong*' means 'from refusal to get anything for a person whilst getting it for oneself', or, 'from refusal to co-operate on a basis of reciprocity' (Howell and Bailey 1900: 47, 148).

[26] In the two long-houses—Gansurai (nineteen doors), of Sungai Layar, and Plandok (thirteen doors), of Sungai Paku—which I studied in the Saribas district of the Second Division of Sarawak, there was not a single instance of married siblings occupying the same *bilek*.

[27] When the family is a large one as many as four or five siblings may be left behind in the ancestral *bilek*, and it sometimes happens that, after a lapse of years, another sibling marries and partition takes place a second time. It should also be noted that the senior section usually (i.e. in about 90% of cases) contains one or both of the parents of the seceding son or daughter. This means that when *bileks* divide they almost always divide into groups which are unequal both in numbers and in generation seniority

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